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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH ISLAMIST LEADERS

REF: A. 06 NOUAKCHOTT 1193
[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 91

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES CHARLES H. TWINING FOR REASON 1.4 (B,D
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[1](#)1. (C) Charge and DCM called on newly elected National Assembly member Jemil Mansour, coordinator of the RC (Reformistes Centristes) group and head of the political wing of the Islamist movement in Mauritania, January 30, as part of our occasional contact with that group. Our last meeting was reported ref A. Together with Mansour were former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Moktar Mohamed Moussa, head of the movement's religious wing, and its diplomatic relations chief Amar Ould Mohamed Najem.

[1](#)2. (C) As in the previous meeting, all insisted that the movement's principal interests are democracy and moderation. While there are differences between the views of their group and the U.S. on "some issues," they also felt that our support for democracy makes us an important partner in Mauritania, and they welcomed the contact. The group's ire was directed at President Vall and the Military Council for their alleged interference in the electoral process. Indeed, Mansour had left a press conference of the CFCD (Coalition des Forces du Changement Democratique, of which his Islamist movement is a part) denouncing Vall's recent statements (septel forthcoming) in order to meet with us. As "evidence" of Vall's less than neutral position, he observed that the CFCD has requested a meeting with him several times, without response.

[1](#)3. (C) We said that most important of all is that the March elections be clean, the regime neutral, and the best person elected and take office. Mansour said he considered running himself but knew the group had already exhausted itself, and its finances, in the previous elections. He was clearly pleased with the legislative and municipal seats the RC had won (as independents) and the fact that it had just had a woman senator elected. He said his group came out in the elections overall third. He observed that the RC was under no illusion that it could win a widespread victory in the country and, thus, preferred to press the CFCD to unite behind a single candidate. When that did not happen, it decided to try to reach agreement on supporting a single candidate and expects to announce its decision in a week.

[1](#)4. (C) Asked whether at least two of the Presidential candidates described as Islamists (ref B) are really a way for the group, which the present regime refuses to recognize as a party, to slip people in through a back door, the three laughed and said, not at all. They said anyone and everyone in this Muslim country can call himself an Islamist, and indeed the GIRM uses that word in a perjorative sense to label them, thus their preference to use the name Reformistes Centristes. Mansour said the other candidates were not affiliated with them. Asked whether it was true that the

ideologues in their movement had basically lost influence, Mansour claimed that, while "one or two" members might be more radical than others, his movement is truly composed of moderates. A perception in the West and even among some in the Military Council that all Islamists are in some kind of radical worldwide movement is simply untrue, Mansour insisted. He bemoaned the fact that the government continues to try to exclude his group from the process, which will only force it into a more extreme position. Mauritanian Islamists are Mauritanian, first and foremost.

15. (C) Comment. The meeting was cordial, the group asking for continued contact. We said we would be pleased to work with any group committed to democracy. Despite Mansour's belief that the government is working against him, he clearly wants to work within the system. Unlike last time he made no mention of boycotting elections. Najem said the RC was pleased to be included in NDI's training efforts, despite its lack of official recognition as a party.

Twining